DEVOTIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN SHAIVA SIDDHANTA AND RELIGION OF SAINTS (WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO KABIR, GURU NANAK AND RADHASOAMI FAITH) – A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

A

Synopsis

Submitted for the partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

THEOLOGY

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2018

DEVOTIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN SHAIVA SIDDHANTA AND RELIGION OF SAINTS (WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO KABIR, GURU NANAK AND RADHASOAMI FAITH) -

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I Introduction

1.1 Historical Background:- In the course of its long history, amongst the significant messages India has placed before the world at large is the innate divinity of man. The spiritual vision of India has left indelible marks on humanity in general and on the people of Indian sub-continent in particular. India thus cherishes its own vast treasure of spiritual wisdom. It is a rich heritage passed on to posterity over centuries – in the form of spiritual revelations, religious texts (both revealed and realized), the exemplary standards of devotion (bhakti) set by the great saints & devotees of the Lord and their worship practices, the exquisite architectural places of worship /temples/monuments, etc. These constitute our wealth by virtue of which our country came to be regarded as a repository of high spiritual values and center of Eastern Philosophy by the world. A study on the origin and development of the devotional consciousness of its diverse religious traditions can therefore be expected not only to refresh our beliefs in them but also to safeguard the sanctity of our faith in the One Supreme Reality.

1.2 Accordingly we take up the study of one of the most ancient philosophies, yet currently in vogue, viz., Shaiva Siddhanta along with that of the modern day living faith of Religion of Saints, (with particular reference to Kabir, Guru Nanak and Radhasoami Faith), not only unraveling the evolution of the devotional consciousness in India but also their contribution to society in the modern world.

1.3 It may be observed here that though several exclusive studies on these traditions have been done, this Study adopts a novel approach of a comparative study of these traditions, not only exploring the various dimensions of these traditions to bring to light their eternal truths but also to study their impact on society in a comparative perspective. In this introductory part, we give a brief overview of these lofty traditions.

1.4 Shaivism may be traced to the Vedas, Upanishads, Agamas, Itihaas & Puranas apart from the Indus Valley period findings, and counts amongst its followers a large chunk of the Hindus. Sir John Marshall, the Director General of Archeological of Survey of India in the early twentieth century, has stated in his Report that Shaivism flourished even before the advent of the Aryans in India. The meaning of Shaivism (or the Sanskrit word Shaiva) is 'relating to God Shiva', while the name 'Shiva' itself means the auspicious one. Shaivism relates to the beliefs & practices, history & literature covering all its sub-traditions.

1.5 Branches of Shaivism :- Shaivism developed in due course of time many sub-traditions, the more prominent ones being the following:-

(i) Pasupata Shaivism: is said to be the oldest heritage, attributed to the sage from Gujarat, Lakulisha (2nd CE) and was popular in Gujarat, Nepal, Rajasthan etc.;

(ii) Kashmir Shaivism: emerged in Kashmir in 1st millennium CE but became nearly extinct except for its preservation by Kashmiri pundits;

(iii) Shaiva Siddhanta: meaning the established doctrine of Shaivism; dating from 5th century AD, it is popular and currently active in South India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Singapore;

(iv) Nath tradition or Siddha Sampradaya; can be traced to 9th - 10th century AD, by Matsyendranath and Gorakhnath in Northern India..

(v) Lingayat or Veera Shaivism: Founded in the 12th century AD by Basava with the adherents mostly from Karnataka and nearby regions. There are various other sub-sects like the Mantramarga, Ganpatya Sect etc.

1.6 Origin of Shaiva Siddhanta:- One of the schools of philosophy of Shaivism being Shaiva Siddhanta , its origin and date is clearly interlinked to Shaivism itself.. Shaiva Siddhanta generally relates to the religion and philosophy of the South and to that of the Tamils in particular. The word 'Siddhantam' in general means the established end of ends, or the conclusion of different doctrines of thought in India. Shaiva Siddhanta may thus mean the established conclusions of Shaiva Religion. The Shaiva Siddhanta tradition is based on the system of Siddhanta philosophy which originated from Shaiva Agamas, particularly, the Kaamika Agama amongst others.

1.7 Basic Concepts of Shaiva Siddhanta:- The fundamental teachings of Shaiva Siddhanta are its philosophies of monotheism and Jnana marga which are based on Shaiva Agamas but it upholds the concept of pluralistic realism. According to this doctrine, all the three Universal Realities : Pati (God), Pasu (Souls) and the Pasa (Bonds) are co-eternal. It recognizes 36 tattvas and adopts a four-fold path to liberation : the Charya, Kriya, Yoga and Jnana which are called as the 4 Padas.

1.8 The Bhakti Movement and the growth of Shaiva Siddhanta:- The Bhakti movement refers to the spiritual devotional trend that emerged in South India during 7th – 10th century A.D. initiated by the sixty three Nayanmar saints (Shaivite devotees) and the

twelve Alvar saints (Vaishnavaite devotees), who denounced the sermons of extreme austerities by Jainism and Buddhism and instead glorified personal devotion to God as a means of salvation. These Saints established a rapport with the local populace since they communicated in simple local languages like Tamil and Telugu and were able to convey their message of love and devotion to one and all, irrespective of caste, colour, creed or gender, with their highly ecstatic devotional songs. Shaiva Siddhanta grew into a staunch faith amongst the local populace during this period. Thus the Bhakti Movement was essentially founded in South India and later spread to the North during the late medieval period.

1.9 The Spread of Bhakti Movement to the North:- Though the Bhakti movement emerged in old fashioned Hinduism, it later reformed in Sikhism and Sant Mat. The medieval period saw the spread of devotional movements led by Ramanuja, Ramananda, Namadeva, Tukaram, Guru Nanak, Surdas, Chaitanya, Mirabai, Dadu Dayal, Tulsi Sahab and many other saints in the rest of India. Even though the spread of Bhakti Movement from South to North India was a slow process, it was a very popular movement across the country. The Bhakti movement upholds Bhakti Marga or Bhakti Yoga for attaining salvation. Among the early Bhakti Saints to spread their devotional culture to the North were Namadeva and Ramananda (14th century). The latter, a follower of Ramanuja, preached the doctrine of Bhakti to people of all castes. There were two alternate ways of devotion during Bhakti movement – one was the Nirguna Bhakti and the other, Saguna Bhakti. Among the Bhakti sants, Ramanuja, Ramananda, Surdas, Chaitanya, Mirabai etc. were Saguna Bhakti saints while others like Kabir, Guru Nanak, etc. were Nirguna sants. The

Radhasoami Faith, though practices Saguna Bhakti, ultimately leads to Nirguna Bhakti.

1.10 **Kabir** (1398-1518 AD), the great mystic philosopher-saint of the 15th century, was the most renowned disciple of Ramanand and is considered to be the founder of Sant Mat. Sant Mat literally translates to Religion of Saints and the Sants are stated to be divine personalities who have descended from the Purely Spiritual Region viz., Sat Loka and beyond. Kabir delivered his lofty teachings in local dialect of Hindi which was appealing to the masses. He revealed that though God is called by many names, he is in fact, One. His immortal message of equality, love, communal harmony and brotherhood continue to inspire and guide us even today. His teachings displayed the chief hallmarks of Bhakti Movement, viz., his denouncement of caste system, untouchability, idol worship, pilgrimages and other rituals besides the intense devotion to the One Supreme Almighty. The basic teaching of Sant Mat, is that the real path to God lies within each human being and only a true Guru can show that path to man. The following popular couplet of Kabir sahab may be recalled in this context:

Guru Govind dou khade, Kake lagoon paye I

Balihari guru aapne, Govind diyo milay II

Here Kabir says that Guru is even greater than God. He says, if Guru and God are both in front of me, whom will I greet first. He then says, that I prostrate before the Guru as it is only because of Guru's teachings that I am able to see God. He therefore, highlighted the importance of Guru worship in achieving the goal of life.. Thus the Bhakti movement may be said to have reached its culmination with the dawning of Sant Mat.

1.11 **Guru Nanak**, who was the founder of Sikhism and the contemporary of Kabir Sahab, is understandably the most revered religious figure of Sikh religion. His teachings have

endured the test of times and they continue to remain relevant even today. Guru Nanak led a simple but extraordinary life, preaching a straight forward way to find God in one's own heart through inner purity and social responsibility. Guru Nanak advocated getting guidance of a true Guru , as a remedy for turning towards God and remembering God in our hearts so that goodness of God may subdue and eliminate the evil from our heart and society. Guru Nanak was followed by a chain of nine Gurus and Sikhism as a religion took shape under the influence and teachings of all these Gurus. The principle teachings of Sikhism include Nam Simran (Repeating the name of God), Bhajan and Kirtan apart from righteous actions which are means to salvation. The Moolmantra propounded by Guru Nanak explains the basic beliefs of Sikhism :

"*Ek Onkar, Satnam, Karta purakh, Nirabhav, Niravir,*

Akal murat, Ajuni Saibhang, Gurprasadi"

viz., that God is One, eternal, creator and sustainer of all things. He is immanent in His creation, without fear and without enmity. He is not subject to time and is beyond birth and death. He is known by the grace of Guru.

Thus it has been declared that liberation is not possible without the helping hand of a Guru. As may be noted from the above, the theistic idealism of Bhakti movement continues into the later movements of Kabir and Guru Nanak also, though the emphasis shifted to the importance of Guru in realization of the same.

1.12 Pinnacle of Bhakti Movement;- It can be said that with the advent of Param Sant Soamiji Maharaj at the turn of the 19th century, the Bhakti Movement reached its pinnacle when Radhasoami faith, was founded. He proclaimed:

"*Bhakti sunayi sabse nyari, Ved Kateb na tahi bichari* II"

The above declaration makes it clear how the message of Radhasoami Dayal is a new

message to the humanity and the Bhakti or devotion expounded by Him is unique and never before made : the unique features are (a) devotion to a living Sant Satguru (b) the sacred name revealed is a 'Dhunyatmak' word unlike other 'Varnatmak' names (c) it has been assured that the lineage of Sant Satgurus would continue till the redemption of all jivas, taking them to the highest level of spiritual consciousness.

His lineage now continues in Radhasoami Satsang at Dayalbagh (Agra) besides other Sects of the Faith elsewhere in India and abroad. The Faith declared the salvation of all living beings by devotion to a living Sant Satguru who is considered an incarnation of the Supreme Being Radhasoami, through the performance of spiritual practices, viz., Satsang, Seva and Surat Shabda Yoga. Paramount significance is thus attached to the bhakti (devotion) of a living Sant Satguru in Radhasoami Faith.

1.13 Devotional Consciousness in Shaiva Siddhanta and Religion of Saints

It may be observed that the ordinary human consciousness , even in the men of great talent and achievements, is an awareness thrown outwards – the whole consciousness is directed outwards. To live a spiritual life, a reversal of consciousness is needed. The devotional consciousness cannot be judged with mental consciousness / mental faculties as one is in the habit of seeking it normally. It is the individual's capacity to withdraw from ordinary activities and to set out fervently in search of the spiritual life. While the levels of

Consciousness have been expounded in Shaiva Siddhanta, the modern holistic studies on Consciousness are venturing to explore and identify scientifically the higher levels of Consciousness , as revealed in the Religion of Saints.

II REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Shaiva Siddhanta

2.1 Sir John Elliot, the Oxford historian, has commented on the literature of Shaiva Siddhanta as follows: 'In no literature with which I am acquainted has the individual religious life – its struggles and dejections, its hopes and fears, its confidence and its triumph – received delineation more frank and more profound'.

2.2 The Literature & Scriptures of Shaiva Siddhanta:

One of the principle features of Bhakti in Southern Shaivism is its devotional songs that are sung regularly even today in temples, concert halls and homes. The scriptures held in reverence by the Shaiva Siddhanta are the **Vedas**, the twenty-eight Hindu **Agamas**; the twelve books of the Tamil Shaiva canon called the **Tirumurai**, which includes the great works of the Nayanmar saints; besides the **Shaiva Siddhanta Shastras**. ***Tirumandiram***, which is also one of the above referred Tirumurais, written by the legendary Shaivaite saint Tirumular, is considered a basic source of Shaiva Siddhanta philosophy. As per some accounts, Tirumular belonged to 7th or 8th century. The **Tiruvacakam** by the Nayanmar saint Manickavacagar is an important collection of hymns of the Shaiva Siddhanta. Consdiered to be one of the chief sources for the development of Shaiva Siddhanta school of thought, the "Sacred Utteranes" or the 'Tiruvacagam' is greatly dear to the sourthern Shaivites even today and is an outstanding devotional literature of Shaiva Siddhanta. It is said that one whose heart does not melt to the hymns of Tiruvachagam, will not melt to anything else.

Tirumandiram which is the earliest known Tamil treatise on Yoga, and stated to be the only Tamil Siddha text on Consciousness, composed by the Shaivite Siddha Saint, Tirumular, describes various states of consciousness vividly as in Tantras (Chapters) 7 & 8 thereof. However, as per a Study, the above work uses the terms *arivu, bodham, nandi* and *sivam* to

describe the various states of consciousness, of which sivam or *siva bodham* is the state of supreme consciousness. In Chapter VIII of Tirumandiram, he propounds :

Jiva-knowledge cognizing Para-knowledge is Jagrat

Jiva-knowledge cognizing-ceasing is Dream

Jiva-knowledge cognizing, Yet knowing it not, is Sushupti;

Jiva-knowledge merging in Para-Knowledge is Turiya verily.

He also speaks of the Turiyatita state, the state which is born out of Turiyta state, and the highest state known in the Upanishadic religion.

The Hindu Bhakti movement was capped with the collection of the Vaishnava and Shaiva hymns by Nathamuni and Nambiander Nambi respectively in the late 10th and 11th centuries.

While the love of the Lord implies for the Shaiva Nayanmars / Siddhantins, love for all the devotees, the declaration of Tirumular sums up the philosophy –

i.e., "May this world share the bliss that I have had"

2.3 Sant Kabir

In the introduction to "One Hundred Poems of Kabir" by Rabindranath Tagore, Evelynn Underhill (1915) says "Kabir became in early life, a disciple of the celebrated Ramananda who had brought to North India the religious revival of Ramanuja, the great 12^{th} century reformer of Brahminism, that was initiated in the South." This brings to light on the spread of Bhakti Movement from South to North India.

2.4 Guru Nanak

Dr.S.Radhakrishnan (1982), writing about Guru Nanak, says that in his time Guru Nanak took up integration of Hindu and Muslims and taught that the Quran and the Puranas teach the same thing; whether it is a mosque or a temple, we see the same God, highlighting the fact that the Bhakti movement also served as a vehicle for social reformation.

2.5 Radhasoami Faith

Radhasoami Reality : Mark Juergensnmeyer (1991), the well known American scholar in religious studies and sociology states about Radhasoami Faith : "The Radhasoami Faith may be a harbinger of the religion of the future not only in India, but elsewhere in the world ---."

2.6 The literature and scriptures of Radhasoami Faith:

Sar Bachan (Poetry) : In the Religion of Saints, various levels of consciousness are explained in Sar Bachan (Poetry) (Bachan 25,Shabd 2) composed by Soamiji Maharaj , the founder of Radhasoami Faith:

Jag jagrat bhau dukh mool, Supna bhi dukh sukh sool II

Sushupati kuch ghar aaram, vah bhi nahin thaharan dham II

Teenon mein bharamat aatho jam, puraa nahi kahin bisram II

Turiya pad marag gaya, turiya se aagey barana II etc.

Param Guru Maharaj Sahab, the third Revered Leader of Radhasoami Faith, has propounded the nature of Consciousness in the following famous Prem Sutra or the Aphorism of Love :-

" *Athah Prema sutram vyakyasyam;*

Satchidananda swarupam Chaitanyam"

"We shall now explicate the Aphorism of Love –

Consciousness is of the nature of Truth, Intelligence and Bliss. "

(This has further been elaborately revealed by Revered Prof. P.S.Satsangi Sahab, the current leader of Radhasoami Faith at Dayalbagh, Agra.)

In other words, the above Sutra of Love explains that the Supreme Being is Consciousness Personified.

Selected Bachans (Discourses) :Param Guru Sarkar Sahab, the fourth Revered Leader of Radhasoami Faith has declared that the Religion of Saints is a religion of Prema Bhakti (love and devotion). He has explained that devotion means directing the current of one's attention to the Holy Feet of the Supreme Lord.

Discourses delivered in Satsang : Param Guru Sahabji Maharaj, the fifth Revered Leader of Radhasoami Faith states, "that devotion alone is valued in the Religion of Saints as springs directly from feelings of love and not out of fear or greed.. The condition of the person who is blessed with true and perfect devotion is such that the moment he hears or happens to pronounce the Name of the True Supreme Being or the Satguru, he feels thrilled with emotion and on the least mention of His grace, his eyes become moist out of love and gratefulness…" In this regard, He also cites Maulana Rumi, the great sufi saint, who says:

> '*When a true devotee, not moved by any feelings of gratitude or thoughts of complaint, weeps himself out (out of sheer Love), great commotion takes place in all the seven heavens' and God's mercy is showered on him in such a way that he begins to understand the sense in which God is known as Merciful*.'

Expositions on Truth, Ultimate Reality and Supreme Being: Most Revered Prem Saran Satsangi (2010), the current Leader of Radhasoami Satsang, Dayalbagh, has pointed out that the devotion performed in Radhasoami Faith is devotion to Param Purush, the Supreme Being and it is not external but internal, and it is not based on traditions or conventions. He has presented a rudimentary modelling framework for Spiritual Domains which succinctly illustrates the eighteen levels of Consciousness in the Macrocosm which are also represented in the human Microcosm.

The Dayalbagh Herald (Weekly post from Dayalbagh): The major similarities and differences in the concepts of Shaiva Siddhanta vis-à-vis that of Radhasoami Philosophy

have been succinctly brought out in an interesting dialogue between a follower of Shaivism from South India who visited Dayalbagh, the Hqrs. of Radhasoami Faith in Agra in 1983 and Prem Saran, then a Satsangi from Dayalbagh, (vide Article published in the Dayalbagh Herald dated July 13, 1982.).

III Materials & Methods

It is proposed to consult the senior faculty members of DEI and other Institutions in South for throwing light on the lofty principles of these Faiths. Besides the libraries of DEI, Divinity Study Forum (Radhasoami Satsang Sabha, Dayalbagh), University Libraries at Chennai, Delhi, etc., are also proposed to be consulted along with the online resources available. It is also proposed to interact with the religious institutions / members of Shaiva Siddhanta and of the other traditions in focus to acquaint with their current trends. Wherever feasible, the concerned religious institutions would be visited to get first-hand information on the philosophy and contribution of these Faiths to the society at large.

IV Objectives of the Study would be as follows:

- To study the origin and evolution of devotional consciousness in terms of the Bhakti movement in southern and northern India, in the context of Shaiva Siddhanta and Religion of Saints, with particular reference to Kabir, Guru Nanak and Radhasoami Faith, demonstrating that the roots of Bhakti movement lie in Southern India.;
- To make an in-depth study of the various principles and concepts of Shaiva Siddhanta and Religion of Saints with focus on teachings of Kabir, Guru Nanak and Radhasoami Faith and to place their principles within a comparative framework to bring out the major points of parallels and contrasts;
- To analyze the crucial role of devotional consciousness in improving the living conditions of mankind in today's mechanized and technical world, highlighting the impact of the teachings of Shaiva Siddhanta vis-à-vis those of Kabir, Guru Nanak and Radhasoami Faith

on Society;

- To highlight the many facets of devotional consciousness as reflected in the lives and works of some eminent saints of these faiths.

V Keeping in view the above objectives, the chapter-wise scheme of the proposed study would be broadly as follows:

I Introduction

II Devotional Consciousness : Meaning, & its dimensions

III An Overview of Shaiva Siddanta and its Devotional Consciousness

IV Devotional Consciousness in Religion of Saints with focus on teachings of Kabir, Guru Nanak and Radhasoami Faith -An Overview

V Sound , Music & dance in Shaiva Siddhanta and Religion of Saints (With Particular reference to Kabir, Guru Nanak and Radhasoami Faith.)

VI Shaiva Siddhanta & Religion of Saints (with Particular reference to Kabir, Guru Nanak and Radhasoami Faith.) : A Comparative Perspective & Analysis

VII The Contribution to Society by Shaiva Siddhanta and Religion of Saints (particularly those of Kabir , Guru Nanak and Radhasoami Faith).

VIII Conclusions.

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